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UNCLAS KUWAIT 000768

SIPDIS

FOR BERNs AT NEA/ARPI

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SUBJECT: "SYRIAL KILLERS:" MARCHERS IN KUWAIT PROTEST
MURDER OF RAFIQ HARIRI

1. A crowd of 100-200 peaceful protesters chanted anti-Syrian slogans, waved Lebanese flags and carried pictures of the late Rafiq Hariri near the Embassy of Lebanon in Kuwait on February 21, coinciding with a protest through the streets of downtown Beirut. This was the second such rally in Kuwait in as many days. Kuwaiti police looked on as marchers sang the Lebanese national anthem, recited the opening verse (al-fatihah) of the Koran and displayed signs (in Arabic, English and French) with slogans such as: "syrial killers," "Syria out," "leave us alone" and "yes to freedom, no to occupation."

2. Poloff attended the rally and observed that the majority of the protesters ranged in age from 20 to 40 years old. From the number of people reciting the Koranic verse, many marchers were Muslim although Christians were present, identified by the common practice of wearing a cross on one's outer garment. The protesters, some of whom donned red and white scarves, displayed handwritten and pre-printed signs as they walked up and down Istiqlaal Street in the diplomatic quarter. Police, however, prevented marchers from approaching the embassy itself. The primary role of the police seemed traffic control as they were wearing regular uniforms without visible body armor. The gathering lasted approximately 30 minutes before the crowd began to disperse.

3. Comment: Such rallies are not common in Kuwait, and this gathering is indicative of the high esteem in which Hariri was held. A rally organizer is required to obtain prior permission from the Ministry of Interior if there will be more than 25 participants. Police dispersed February 20's rally peacefully indicating that the protesters did not possess the proper authorization. Those who returned on February 21 apparently were in compliance as police made no attempts to end the rally prematurely. End comment.
TUELLER